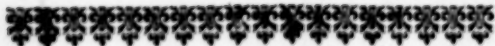




IMPRIMATUR , hic  
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Prescience of the Sins of  
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Apr. 19.  
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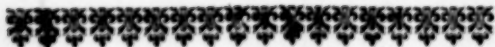




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G. 19. 36

THE  
RECONCILEABLENESS  
OF

**God's Prescience**

OF THE  
SINS of MEN,  
WITH THE  
WISDOM and SINCERITY  
OF HIS  
COUNSELS, EXHORTATIONS,  
And  
Whatsoever other Means He uses  
to prevent them.

---

In a Letter to the Honorable  
*Robert Boyle Esq;*

---

LONDON:

Printed for *Brabazon Aylmer*, at the  
three Pigeons, over against the  
*Royal Exchange* in *Cornhil*. 1677.



274:04



THE  
RECONCILEABLENESS  
OF  
God's Prescience, &c.

---

Sir,

**T**He veneration I have long had  
for your Name, could not per-  
mit me to apprehend less ob-  
ligation than that of a Law, in your re-  
commending to me this subject. For  
within the whole compass of intellectual  
employment and affairs, none but who

are so unhappy as not at all to know you;  
would dispute your right to prescribe,  
and give Law.

And taking a nearer view of the  
Province you have assigned me, I must  
esteem it alike both disingenuous and un-  
dutiful, wholly to have refus'd it. For  
the less you could think it possible to me  
to perform in it, the more I might per-  
ceiv of kindness allaying the Authority  
of the imposition; And have the appre-  
hension the more obvious to me that you  
rather design'd in it mine own advan-  
tage, than that you reckon'd the cause  
could receiv any, by my undertaking it.

The doubt, I well know, was mention'd  
by you as other Mens, and not your  
own; whose clear mind, and diligent  
enquiry leave you little liable to be en-  
cumb'ed with greater difficulties.

Wherefore that I so soon divert from  
you, and no more allow these papers to  
express any regard unto you, till the  
shutting

shutting of the discourse, is only a seeming disrespect or indecorum, put in the stead of a real one. For after you have given them the countenance, as to let it be understood, you gave the first rise and occasion to the business and design of them; I had little reason to slur that stamp put upon them, by adding to their (enough other) faults, that of making them guilty of so great a misdemeanour, and impertinency, as to continue a discourse of this length, to one that hath so little leasure or occasion to attend to any thing can be said by them.

**W**Hat there is of difficulty .§. 1.  
 in this matter I cannot  
 pretend to set down in those most  
 apt expressions wherein it was re-  
 A 4 presented

presented to me, and must therefore endeavour to supply a bad memory out of a worse invention.

So much appears very obvious, That, ascribing to the ever blessed God, among the other Attributes which we take to belong to an every way Perfect Being, a knowledge so perfect as shall admit of no possible accession or increase; and consequently the Prescience of all future events (as whereof we doubt him not to have the distinct knowledge when they shall have actually come to pass.) Since many of those events are the sinful actions or omissions of men, which he earnestly counsels and warns them against; This matter of doubt cannot but arise hereupon, viz.

*How it can stand with the wisdom & sincerity*

rity which our own thoughts do by the earliest anticipation challenge to that ever happy Being, to use these (or any other means) with a visible design to prevent that, which, in the mean time appears to that all-seeing eye, sure to come to pass.

So that, by this representation of the Case, there seem to be committed together. Either 1<sup>st</sup>. Gods wisdom with this part of his knowledg. For we judg it not to consist with the wisdom of a man, to design and pursue an end, which he foreknows he shall never attain : Or 2<sup>ly</sup>. the same foreknowledg with his sincerity and uprightness, that he seems intent upon an end, which indeed he intends not.

The matter then comes shortly to this summe. Either the holy God seriously intends the prevention of such foreseen sinful actions  
and

(4)

and omissions or he doth not intend it. If he do, His wisdom seems liable to be impleaded, as above. If he do not, his uprightness and Truth.

My purpose is not, in treating of this affair, to move a dispute concerning the fitness of the words [prescience] or [foreknowledg] Or to trouble this discourse with notions I understand not, of the indivisibility, and unsuccessiveness of eternal duration, Whence it would be collected there can be no such thing as *first* or *second* fore-or-after-knowledg in that duration. But be contented to speak as I can understand, and be understood. That is, to call that foreknowledg which is the knowledg of somewhat that as yet is not, but that shall sometime come to pass. For  
it

it were a meer piece of legerdemain only to amuse enquirers whom one would pretend to satisfie. Or to fly to a cloud for refuge from the force of an argument, and avoid an occurring difficulty by the present reliefless shift of involving one-self in greater.

Nor shall I design to my self so large a field as a *Tractate* concerning the *divine Prescience*. So as to be obliged to discourse particularly whatsoever may be thought to belong to that Theological Topic. But confine the discourse to my enjoyned subject. And offer only such considerations as may some way tend to expedite or alleviate the present difficulty.

II. It were one of the greatest injuries to Religion, a subversion indeed of its very foundations. s. II.  
And

And then by doing which, we could not more highly gratifie atheistical minds, instead, and under pretence of ascribing perfecti-  
 ons to the nature of God, to ascribe to it inconsistencies, or to give a self-repugnant notion of that adorable Being, The parts whereof should jussle and not accord with one another. And yet equal care is to be taken, lest while we endeavour to frame a consistent notion of God, we reject from it any thing that is truly a perfection, and so give a maimed one. Whereby we should undo our own design, and by our over much caution to make our conception of him agree with it self, make it disagree to him. For to an *absolutely perfect Being*, no other can agree than that, which not only is not made up of contradictions, but which also comprehends



(7)

prehends in it all real perfections either explicitly, or which leaves room for all, by not positively excluding any of them. Which to do, and afterward, to assign that as the proper notion of God, were, it self, the greatest contradiction. We need therefore to be very warie, lest we pronounce too hastily concerning any thing, which to our most sedate thoughts, appears simply a perfection in it self, that it carries with it a repugnancie to somewhat else, necessary to be ascribed to him.

We are first to suspect (as there is greatest cause) and enquire whether the aile be not wholly in our own minds. Which in this and such like cases, we certainly shall upon due reflection, find labouring under the natural defect of that incomprehensive narrowness,  
that

that is, in some degree, unavoidably followed with confusion and indistinctness of thoughts. And may perhaps find cause to accuse them of the more culpable evils, both of slothfulness, that withholds them from doing what they can, and self-conceit by which they imagine to themselves an ability of doing what they cannot.

It cannot be unobserved by them that have made themselves any part of their own study, that it is very incident to our minds, to grasp at more than they can compass ; and then, thorough their own scantiness (like the little hand of a child ) to throw away one thing that hath pleased us, to make room for another, because we cannot comprehend both together.

It is not strange, that our so straitly limited understandings, should

should not be able to lodg commodiously the immense perfections of a Deity. So as to allow them liberty to spread themselves in our thoughts in their entire proportions. And because we cannot, we complain, when we feel our selves a little pinch'd, that the things will not consist ; when the matter is , that we have unduly crouded and huddled them up together , in our incomprehensive minds, that have not distinctly conceived them.

And tho this consideration should not be used for the protection of an usurped liberty of fastening upon God, arbitrarily and at random, what we please (As indeed what so gross absurdity might not any one give shelter to by such a misapplication of it ? ) We ought yet to think it seasonably apply'd,

apply'd, when we find our selves urged with difficulties on one hand and the other ; and apprehend it hard, with cleernes and satisfaction, to ascribe to God, what we also find it not easie not to ascribe.

Nor would it be lesse unfit to apply it for the patronage of that slothfulnes wherein our discouraged minds are sometimes too prone to indulge themselves.

To which purpose I remember somewhat very apposite in *Minucius Felix*, That many thorough the meer tediousness of finding out the truth, do rather, by a mean succumbency, yeild to the first specious shew of any opinion whatsoever than be at the trouble, by a pertinacious diligence, of applying, themselves to a thorough search.

Tho

Tho the comprehension of our Minds be not infinite, it might be extended much further than usually it is, if we would allow our selves with patient diligence to consider things at leisure, and so as *gradually* to stretch and enlarge our own understandings. Many things have carried the appearance of contradiction and inconsistency, to the first view of our straitened minds, which afterwards, we have, upon repeated consideration and endeavour, found room for, and been able to make fairly accord, and lodg together.

Especially we should take heed lest it be *excluded* by over-much conceitednes, and a self-arrogating pride, that disdains to be thought not able to see thorough every thing, by the first and  
 B                      slightest

slightest glance of an haughty  
 eye; and peremptorily deter-  
 mines that to be unintelligible,  
 that an arrogant uninstructed  
 mind hath only not humility  
 enough to acknowledg difficult  
 to be understood. Whence it is  
 too possible some may be over-  
 prone to detract from God what  
 really belongs to him, lest any  
 thing should seem detracted from  
 themselves, and impute imper-  
 fection to him rather than confess  
 their own. And may be so over-  
 ascribing to themselves, as to  
 reckon it a disparagement not to  
 be endured, to seem a little puz-  
 zled for the present; to be put to  
 pause, and draw breath a while,  
 and look into the matter again  
 and again; which if their humi-  
 lity and patience would enable  
 them to do; It is not likely that  
 the

the Author of our faculties would be unassisting to them, in those our enquiries which concern our duty towards himself.

For tho in mattes of meer speculation, we may be encountred with difficulties, whereof perhaps no mortal can ever be able to find out the solution (which is no great prejudice, and may be gainful and instructive to us) Yet as to what concerns the object of our Religion, it is to be hoped we are not left in unextricable entanglements; Nor should think we are till we have made utmost trial. The design being not to gratifie our curiosity, but to relieve our selves of uncomfortable doubtfulness in the matter of our worship, and (in a dutiful zeal towards the blessed object thereof) to vindicate it against the cavils of ill-minded men.

§. III. But if the unsuccessfulnes of often repeated endeavours make us despair of being able, with so full satisfaction, to reconcile some things which we have thought were to be attributed to God; It will be some relief to us, if we find the things about which the doubt lies, are not of the same order, nor such as with equal evidence and necessity are to be affirmed of him.

And when we make a comparison, we may find our selves at a certainty concerning those his Attributes which most commonly, and at the first view, approve themselves to every man's understanding.

Among which we little hesitate, (as we are most concern'd not to do,) about those which carry with them the import of *moral goodness*; and which render the object of  
our



our Religion, at once, both most venerable and lovely. For none do more naturally obtain for common notions concerning him; so as even to prevent ratiocination or argument, with whomsoever the apprehension of his existence hath place.

Every man's mind, it being once acknowledg'd that there is a God, refuses to conceive otherwise of him, than that he is holy, just, merciful, true, &c. And rejects with abhorrency the notion of an impure, unrighteous, cruel, deceitful Deity.

As for those that, by a long train of our own more uncertain and lubricous reasonings, we endeavour to deduce; If we find our selves constrain'd any where to admit a diffidence, It were rather to be plac't here. For it is at

first sight evident, since God is most certainly willing to be known of them that are sincerely willing to know him; that what is a natural impression, stamped by his own hand on every man's mind, hath more of absolute certainty, than what depends on metaphysical subtlety; whereof so very few are capable, and whereby divers pretenders thereto, do so frequently, (and perhaps very dangerously) ensnare themselves. And it is of far greater importance, such a notion of God be entertained, as whereby he may be rendered amiable, and an inviting object of love (the very life and soul of all Religion) than such as shall be the result, and entertainment, only of Scholastic wit.

Yet also since it is very manifest

fest that Man is now become a degenerate Creature, and in an Apostacy from God: He is very little to be trusted with the framing his own *Idea* of him; being certainly most unapt to allow any thing a place in it, that would have an unfavourable aspect upon his vicious inclinations and his guilty state. And the contagion of man's sinfulness having spread it self as far as he hath propagated his own Nature; so as no notion in his Mind can be more common than the perversion and distemper of his mind it self; The possibility and danger is very obvious, of mistaking a dictate of depraved nature for an authentic *common notion*. And tho these are not impossible to be distinguished, and in some cases very easie, as when men find it impos-

sed unavoidably upon them, to apprehend and acknowledg some things which they are very unwilling should be true (In which case their sentiments have the same right to be believed as the testimony of an enemy on the opposite partie's behalf.) We have yet no reason to neglect any other means, whereby we may be more certainly directed how to conceive of God, or what we are to attribute to him, and what not.

- §. IV. Nor can we be at a greater certainty, than in admitting such things to belong to the Blessed God as he plainly affirms of himself; or any way, by his Word, evidently discovers to belong to
- 1 Cor. 2. him. *For as none knowes the things of a man, but the spirit of a man that is in him, so the things of God are known to none but the Spirit of God,*  
 Taking

Taking therefore his own Word for our measure in the present case (which I will suppose the Reader not to think it unreasonable to appeal to ; And what is here said, is intended only for those that have *that* estimate of the Writings wont to go under that name) what it saies of him (much more what it proves) will no doubt be admitted for certain truth. Though, if it say such things, as, to us, seem not so manifestly to agree with one another, Our endeavour must be the more earnest and solicitous ( as also it ought to be the more modest) to discuss, and remove the *incompatibles*, or whatsoever semblance of disagreement.

And whosoever concern themselves to peruse that venerable Book, will find every where, on the

the one hand, proclaimed and magnify'd in it (what our own minds cannot but have been pre-possessed of) *the most exquisite Wisdom of God*, whereby he forms and contrives the methods of all his dispensations, and disposes them in the aptest subserviency to his own great and most important ends. That *all his waies are judgment*; and that he worketh all things according to the *counsel* of his Will. In summe, that all wisdom is appropriated to him, that he is celebrated in the style of *God, only Wise*. Nor are we therefore to think it strange, if, many times, we are not able to trace him out, or understand the reason of every thing he thinks fit to do. For the paths of the more perfect wisdom, must therefore be expected to be the more abstruse, and

Deut. 32.

Eph. 1.

Rom. 16.

ult.

and remoter from common apprehension.

How often do we find our selves so far outgone by wise and designing men, as that we are sometimes constrain'd to confess and admire their great prudence and conduct (when they have effected their purposes) in those managements, which we have before beheld, either with silent ignorance, or perhaps, not without censure. How much less should the wisest of men regret it, to find all their conjectures exceeded by the infinite Wisdom. In the contemplation whereof, we find the great Apostle (notwithstanding the vast capacity of his divinely enlightned understanding) exclaiming in a transport. *O the depths!*

Rom. 11.

And when our eyes tell us, from <sup>33.</sup>  
so

so manifest stupendous effects, how far we are exceeded by him in power, it were reasonable to expect he should surpass us proportionably in the contrivances of his Wisdom also.

And whereas the conjunction is rare, among men, of deep political wisdom, with integrity and strict righteousness; This proceeds from the imperfection and insufficiency of the former in great part, that they know not how to compass their designs, unless often, by supplying their want of wisdom, out of the spoil and violation of their justice and honesty. Otherwise, these are things not so altogether out of credit in the world, but that men would rather accomplish their purposes by fair and unexceptionable means, if they could tell how. Only the respect



respect and deference they have for them is less, than what they bear to their own interests and ends.

But besides the natural inflexible rectitude of the divine Will, we are secured, from his *all-sufficiency*, that we shall never be fraudulently imposed upon by any of his declarations unto the children of men. For there is nothing to be gained by it: And we cannot conceive what inducement he should have, to make use of any so mean and pitiful shifts for the governing of his Creatures, whom he spontaneously raised out of nothing, and hath so perfectly within his power.

Unless we should be so most intolerably injurious to him, as to imagine a worse thing of him than we would of the worst of men,

men, that he loved falshood *for its own sake*. And *that*, aginst his so constantly professed detestation of it, the declared repugnancie of it to his Nature, and the even tenour of his Word (every where agreeing with it self herein) so often describing him by that property, *God that cannot lye*. And, with the same positivenes, avowing his own uprightnes, and requiring it, expressing his great love to it, and the high delight he takes to find it in his (intelligent)

Pl. 11. 7. creatures. *The righteous God loveth righteounfnes, and with his countenance doth he behold the upright.*

Nor is his testimony the less to be regarded for that it is laudatory, and of himself. For we are to consider the Prerogative of him that testifies, and that if he were not ~~divine~~ he were not God. Besides

sides that his giving us this, or any, representation of himself (to whom it were enough to enjoy his own Perfections) is a *vouchsafement*, and done of meer grace and favour to us, that we may by it be induced to place with satisfaction, our unsuspicious trust and confidence in him. As also, that he saies, in all this, no other thing of himself, than what our own minds, considering him as God, must acknowledg most worthy of him, and agreeing to him with the most apparent necessity.

This part, therefore, of the *Idea* of God hath so firm a foundation, both in the natural complexion of our own minds, and the report which his Word makes of him, that on this hand we are hemm'd in as by a wall of Adamant: And cannot have the thought of defending

fending his *Prescience*, by intrenching upon his Wisdom and Truth, without offering the highest violence both to him and our selves.

- § v. On the other hand also, as it cannot but seem to us an higher perfection to know all things at once, than gradually to arrive to the knowledg of one thing after another; and so proceed from the ignorance of some things to the knowledg of them; and that nothing is more certain, than that all possible perfection must agree to God; So we find his own Word asserting to him that most perfect knowledg which seems to exclude the possibility of increase; or that any thing should *succeed* into his knowledg. For how plainly is it affirmed of him that he *knows all things*. And even concerning

cerning such future things as about which our present enquire is conversant, The affirmation is exprefs and positive. *I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from an-  
 9, 10. with Ch.  
 41. 22,  
 23.* *I am God, and* *Isai. 46.* *there is none like me, declaring the* *end from the beginning, and from an-* *tient times the things that are not yet* *done.*

Nor is the affirmation naked, and unfortify'd. For, in the same sacred records, we have the same thing both affirmed and proved: Inasmuch as we find, in a great part thereof, are contained things foretold by most exprefs Prophecy, unto which the Events recorded in other parts (and many of them in other unquestioned Writings besides) have so punctually corresponded, as to leave no place for doubt or cavil. Instances are so plain and well known that they need not be mentioned. And

C surely

surely what was so expressly foretold could not but have been foreknown.

It seems then an attempt also equally hopeles and unrelieving, as it were adventurous and bold, to offer at the protection of his *Wisdom* and *Sinceritie*, by assaulting his *Prescience* or certain foreknowledg of whatsoever shall come to pass.

And that their defence is not to be attempted this way, will further most evidently appear from hence, That it is not impossible to assign particular instances of some or other most confessedly wicked actions; against which God had directed those ordinary means of counselling and dehorting men, and which yet it is most certain he did foreknow they would do. As, tho it was  
so

so punctually determined even  
 \* to a day, and was (tho not so  
 punctually) † foretold unto *Abra-*  
*ham*, how long, from that time,  
 \* his seed should be strangers in  
 a Land that was not theirs; Yet  
 how frequent are the counsels and  
 warnings sent to *Pharaoh* to dis-  
 miss them sooner; Yea how of-  
 ten are *Moses* and *Aaron* directed  
 to claim their liberty, and exhort  
*Pharaoh* to let them go, and at the  
 same time told, he should not  
 hearken to them. Nor indeed is  
 it more seldome said that the  
 Lord hardened *Pharaoh's* heart, lest  
 he should. Tho it may be a doubt  
 whether those passages be truly  
 translated. For the gentler mean-  
 ing of the Hebrew idiom being  
 well known, it would seem more  
 agreeable to the Text, to have  
 expressed only the intended sense,

\* Exod.

12. 41.

† Gen.

15. 3.

\* What  
 there is of  
 difficulty  
 or doubt  
 about this  
 Prophecy,  
 see fully  
 cleared in  
 the late  
 Letter to  
 the Deist.

Exod. 4.

3ca

than to have strained a word to the very utmost of its literal import, and manifestly beyond what was intended.

Ch. 3.  
v. 4.

After the like manner is the Prophet *Ezekiel* sent to the revolted *Israelites*. And directed to speak to them *with Gods own words*, The summe and purport whereof was to warn and dehort them from their wicked waies *lest they should die*; when as yet it is plainly told him, *But the house of Israel will not hearken to thee, for they will not hearken to me.*

Unto which same purpose it is more pertinent, than necessary to be added, That our Saviours own plain assertions that he was the Son of God, the many Miracles by which he confirmed it, and his frequent exhortations to the *Jews* to believe in him thereupon, had  
a ma-



a manifest tendency to make him be known and believed to be so, and consequently to prevent that most horrid act of his crucifixion (for it is said, and the matter speaks it self, that, *if they had* <sup>1 Cor. 2.</sup> *known they would not have crucify'd the Lord of Glory.*) Notwithstanding that it was a thing which Gods hand and counsel had determined <sup>Act. 4.</sup> before to be done. That is, foreseeing wicked hands would be prompt and ready for this tragic enterprize, his Sovereign Power and Wise Counsel concurred with his foreknowledg, so only, and not with less latitude, to define or determine the bounds and limits of that malignity, than to let it proceed unto this Execution. And to deliver him up (not by any formal resignation, or surrender, as we well know, but

permitting him) thereunto. Tho the same phrase of *delivering him*, hath elsewhere, another notion of *assigning* or *appointing him* to be a propitiation for the sins of men, by dying; which was done by mutual agreement between both the parties, him that was to propitiate, and him who was to be propitiated. In which respect our Saviour is also said to have given himself for the same purpose; Which purpose it was determined not to hinder prepared hands to execute in this way.

Tit. 2.  
14.

Now if it did appear but in one single instance only, that the Blessed God did foreknow, and dehort from the same act, It will be plainly consequent, that his warnings and dehortations from wicked actions in the general, can with no pretence be alledged as  
a proof

a proof against his universal Pre-  
 science. For if the argument [he  
 dehorted from the doing such an  
 action, therefore he did not fore-  
 know it] would be able to con-  
 clude any thing, it must be of  
 sufficient force to conclude uni-  
 versally ; which it cannot do, if  
 but a single instance can be given,  
 wherein it is apparent, he did both  
 dehort and foreknow. It can  
 only pretend to raise the doubt  
 which we have in hand to dis-  
 cuss, *how fitly*, and with what  
 wisdom and sinceritie, he can be  
 understood to interpose his coun-  
 sels and monitions in such a case.

Wherefore nothing remains but s. VI.  
 to consider how these may be  
 reconciled, and made appear to  
 be no way inconsistent with one  
 another,

Nor are we to apprehend herein so great a difficulty, as it were to reconcile his irresistible pre-determinative concurrence to all actions of the creature, *even those that are in themselves most malignantly wicked*, with the wisdom and righteousness of his Laws against them, and severest Punishments of them according to those Laws.

Which sentiments must, I conceive, to any impartial understanding, leave it no way sufficiently explicable, how the influence and concurrence, the holy God hath to the worst of actions, is to be distinguish'd from that which he affords to the best; Wherein such inherently evil actions are less to be imputed to him who forbids them, than to the malicious tempter who prompts to them, or the actor that does them,

them, or wherein not a great deal more. And leave it undeniable, that the matter of all his Lawes, in reference to *all such actions* that ever have been done in the world, was a *simple and most strictly natural impossibilitie*. Nothing being more apparently so, than either not to do an action whereto the agent is determined by an infinite Power; or to separate the malignity thereof, from an intrinsically evil action; And that **this** *natural impossibility of not sinning* was the ineluctable fate of his (at first) *innocent Creatures*. Who also (as the case is to be conceived of with the Angels that kept not their first station) must be understood *irreversibly* condemned to the suffering of eternal punishment, for the not doing of what it was (upon these terms) so absolutely

solutely impossible to them to avoid.

§. VII. This too hard Province the present design pretends not to intermeddle in, As being neither apprehended manageable, for those briefly mentioned considerations, and many more that are wont to be insisted on in this argument.

Nor indeed at all necessary ; For tho many considerations have been with great subtilty, alledg'd and urged to this purpose, by former and some Modern Writers, (Which it is besides the design of these Papers severally to discuss) These two, which seem the most importunate and enforcing, will, I conceive, be found of little force ; and then, the less strength which is in others, will be

be nothing formidable; viz:

That it necessarily belongs to the Original and Fountain-Being, to be the first Cause of whatsoever Being; And consequently, that what there is of positive Being in any the most wicked action, must principally owe it self to the determinative productive influence of this first and sovereign Cause. Otherwise it would seem there were some Being that were neither *Primum*, nor a *primo*.

And again(which we are more concerned to consider, because it more concerns our present subject) that it were otherwise impossible God should foreknow the sinful actions of men (many whereof, as hath been observed, he hath foretold) if their futuration were a meer contingency,  
and

and depended on the uncertain will of the subordinate agent, not determined by the Supream.

But neither of these seem able to infer the dismal conclusion of God's concurring *by a determinative influence* unto wicked actions.

Not the former; For it may well be thought sufficiently to salve the rights and priviledg of the first Cause, to assert that no action can be done but *by a power derived from it*; which, in reference to forbidden actions, intelligent Creatures may use or not use as they please, without over-asserting, that they must be irresistibly determined also, even to the worst of actions done by them. Besides, that it seems infinitely to detract from the Perfection of the ever Blessed God, to affirm he was not able to make  
a Crea-



a Creature, of such a nature, as, being continually sustained by him, and supplied with power every moment suitable to its nature, should be capable of acting; unless whatsoever he thus *enables*, he *determine* (that is, for it can mean no less thing, *impel*) it to do also.

And except it were affirmed *impossible* to God to have made such a Creature, (that is, that it imply'd a contradiction, which certainly can never be proved) there is no imaginable pretence why it should not be admitted he hath done it: Rather than so fatally expose the Wisdom, Goodnes, and Righteousnes of God, by supposing him to have made Lawes for his reasonable Creatures, impossible, thorough his own irresistible counter-action, to  
be

be observed : and afterwards to express himself displeased, and adjudg his Creatures to eternal punishments, for not observing them.

I am not altogether ignorant what attempts have been made to prove it impossible, Nor again, what hath been done to manifest the vanity of those attempts. But I must confess a greater disposition to wonder, that ever such a thing should be disputed, than dispute so plain a case. And that a matter whereupon all moral Government depends, both humane and divine, should not have been determined at the first sight.

'Tis not hard for a good Wit to have somewhat to say for any thing. But to dispute against the common sense of Mankind, we know before hand, is but to  
trifle ;

trifle ; as the essay to prove the impossibility of local motion.

The *notion* of the goodnes and righteousness of God, methinks, should stick so close to our minds, and create such a sense in our Souls, as should be infinitely dearer to us than all our senses and powers. And that we should rather choose to have our sight, hearing, and motive power, or what not besides, disputed, or even torn away from us, than ever suffer our selves to be disputed into a belief, that the holy and good God should irresistibly determine the wills of men to, and punish, the same thing. Nor is it difficult to urge more puzzling sophisms against the former, than for this latter.

But the efforts of a sophistical Wit against sense, and more  
against

against the sense of our Souls, and most of all against the entire summe and substance of all Morality, and Religion, at once, are but like the attempt to batter a Wall of Brass with straws and feathers.

Nor is the assault, on this part, more feeble and impotent, than the defence is wont to be of the other. For I would appeal to the quick refined sense of any sober and pious mind, after serious, inward consultation with it self; being closely urged, with the horror of so black a conception of God [that he should be supposed irresistibly to determine the will of a man to the hatred of his own most Blessed Self, and then to exact severest Punishments for the offence done] what relief it would now be to it, to be only taught

taught to reply, [*That Man is under the Law, and God above it.*]

A defence that doubles the force of the assault. What! that God should make a Law, and necessitate the violation of it! and yet also punish that violation! And th's be thought a sufficient *Salvo*, that himself is not subject to any Law! Will a quick-sented, tender spirit, wounded by so unsufferable indignity, offered to the holy God, be any whit eased or relieved, by the thin sophistry of only a collusive ambiguity in the word [*Law?*] Which sometimes signifies *the declared pleasure of a Ruler to a Subject*, in which sense any eye can see God can be under no law, having no superior. But not-seldome also, an *habitual fixed principle and rule of acting after one steady tenour*. In

D

which

which sense how manifest is it, that the perfect rectitude of God's own holy gracious Nature is an eternal Law to him, infinitely more stable, and immutable, than the Ordinances of day and night!

Or what relief is there in that dream [*of the supposed possibility of God's making a reasonable Creature with an innocent aversion to himself?*] For what can be supposed more repugnant? Or what more impertinent? If innocent, how were it punishable? A Law already made in the case, how can it be innocent?

But whatsoever strength there may be in arguments, and replies, to and fro, in this matter. That which hath too apparently had greatest actual efficacy, with many, hath been the authority and  
name

name of this or that man of reputation ; and the force of that art of imputing a doctrine, already under a prejudicial doom, to some or other ill-reputed former Writer.

I profes not to be skill'd in the use of that sort of weapons. And what reputation ought to be of so great value with us, as that of God and Religion !

Tho if one would take that invidious course, it were easie to evince, that such a predeterminative influx to the production of all whatsoever actions , is the dearly espoused notion of one, of as deservedly an ill character, as ever had the name of a Christian Writer. And whether he would not take that name for a dishonour to him , I pretend not to know.

But let us take this sober account of the present case, [*That in this temporary state of trial, the efficacious grace of God is necessary to actions sincerely good and holy; which therefore all ought undespairingly to seek and pray for. But that in reference to other actions, he doth only supply men with such a power, as whereby, they are enabled, either to act, or, in many instances (and especially when they attempt any thing that is evil) to suspend their own action.*

And surely it carries so unexceptionable a face and aspect with it, that no man, that is himself sober, will think the worst name, of whosoever shall have said the same thing, were a prejudice to it; Or should more oblige him to reject it, then we would think our selves obliged to throw away Gold, or Diamonds, because an  
impure



impure hand hath toucht them ;  
Or to deny Christ, because the  
Devils confest him.

Tho also, if any should impute  
the so stating of this matter, to  
any Authour, that hath been  
wont to go under an ill name  
and character, in the Christian  
Church ; There were a great  
oversight committed (to say no  
harder thing of it.)

For the Writers whose names  
would be supposed a prejudice,  
have neither said the same thing,  
nor with the same design.

They would have this *indeter-*  
*mination* of the power afforded to  
the creature, to be so universal, as  
to extend equally to evil actions  
and to good. And have asserted  
it with a manifest design to ex-  
clude efficacious grace, in refe-  
rence to the best actions.

Whereas this account would make it not of so large extent. (As it were very unreasonable any should) For tho it may well be supposed *extendible* to many actions, besides those that are intrinsically evil, or to any that are not spiritually good, yet nothing enforces (nor can it be admitted) that it should *actually, and alwaies extend* so far. For who can doubt but God can over-rule the inclinations and actions of his creature, when he pleases; and, as shall best consist with his Wisdom, and the Purity of his Nature, either lay on, or take off his determining hand.

Nor is it here asserted with any other design, than to exempt the Blessed God, as far as is possible; from a participation in the evil actions of his Creatures: In the mean

mean time entitling him, most entirely, to those that are sincerely good. Tho it must be left imputable to men themselves (it being thorough their own great default) if they have not the grace, which might effectually enable them, to do such also.

*And as for the latter.* This supposed indetermination of the human will, in reference, especially, to wicked actions, is far from being capable of inferring, that God cannot therefore foreknow them; Or any thing more, than that we are left ignorant of the way, how he foreknowes them. And how small is the inconvenience of acknowledging that? Yea and how manifest the absurdity of not acknowledging the like, in many cases? Since nothing is more certain, than that God doth many

things besides, whereof the manner, how he does them, we can neither explicate nor understand! For neither is it difficult to assign instances, more than enough, of actions done by our selves, of the manner whereof, we can give no distinct account, as those of vision, intellection, with sundry other.

Some have been at great pains we well know to explain the manner of God's foreknowledg of these futurities, otherwise than by laying the foundation thereof in his (supposed) efficacious will or decree of them. They that can satisfie themselves with what *Thomas* and *Scotus* have attempted, and the followers of them both; That can understand what it is, *with the one*, for all things to be eternally present to the Divine intellect

intellect in *esse reali*, and not understand by it, the World to have been eternal. Or what, *with the other*, that they be all present only in *esse representativo*, and not understand by it barely *that they are all known*, and no more, (which seems like the explication of the word invasion, by invasion) let them enjoy their own satisfaction.

For my own part I can more easily be satisfied to be ignorant of the *modus* or *medium* of his knowledg, while I am sure of the thing ; And I know not why any sober-minded man might not be so too. While we must all be content to be ignorant of the manner, yea and nature too, of a thousand things besides, when that such things there are, we have no doubt. And when there are  
few

few things, about which we can, with less disadvantage, suffer our being ignorant ; or, with less disreputation, profess to be so.

It cannot therefore be so affrightful a thing, to suppose God's foreknowledg of the most contingent future actions, well to consist with our ignorance, how he foreknows them, as that we should think it necessary, to overturn and mingle Heaven and Earth, rather than admit it.

- §. VIII. Wherefore waving that unfeasible, unnecessary, and unenjoyed task, of defending God's *predeterminative* concourse unto sinful actions; Our encounter must only be of the more superable difficulty, to reconcile his *Prescience* of them, with his provisions against them, *i. e.* how fitly

fitly the Wise and Holy God can have interposed his precautions and dissuasions, in their own nature, aptly tending to withhold and divert men, from those evil actions, which he yet foresees they will do.

And it is, in the first place, evident, there can be no pretence to alledg, that there is any such repugnancy in the matter, as shall amount to a contradiction, so much as virtual, or which the things signify'd, on the one part and the other, can be understood any way to import, That indeed there should be a direct and explicate contradiction between *foreknowing* and *dehorting*, we may, at first sight, perceive the terms cannot admit; For there is nothing enuntiated (affirmed or denied) in either. But let the sense  
of

of both be resolved into Propositions, capable of being confronted to one another, And all that can be made of the former, will only come to this ]you will do such a thing] and of the latter, no more but this [you ought not to do it] These are at as great distance, as can be imagined, from grating upon, or jarring with one another.

And wherein is the *indecorum* of it, that both these *effata* should proceed from the same mouth, *viz.* of a Governour, or one that hath authority over others.

We will, for discourse sake, suppose a Prince, endowed with the Gift or Spirit of Prophecy. This, most will acknowledg a great perfection, added to whatsoever other his accomplishments. And suppose we this his Prophetic ability



lity so large, as to extend to most events that shall fall out within his dominions. Is it hereby become unfit for him to govern his Subjects by Lawes? or any way admonish them of their duty? Hath this Perfection so much diminished him as to depose him from his Government?

It is not indeed to be dissembled, that it were a difficulty to determine, whether such foresight were, *for himself*, better or worse. Boundless knowledge seems only in a fit conjunction with as unbounded power. But it is altogether unimaginable that it should destroy his relation to his Subjects. As what of it were left, if it should despoil him of his Legislative Power, and capacity of governing according to Lawes made by it?

And

And to bring back the matter to the Supream Ruler. Let it for the present be supposed only, that the Blessed God hath, belonging to his Nature, the universal Prescience whereof we are discoursing ; We will, surely, upon that supposition, acknowledg it to belong to him as a Perfection.

And were it reasonable to affirm that by a perfection he is disabled for Government ? Or were it a good consequence [He foreknowes all things, he is therefore unfit to govern the World !]

- §. IX. And, that we may consider the matter more narrowly ; Would the supposition of such foreknowledge, in God, make that cease to be Man's duty, which had otherwise been so ? and take away the differences of good and evil ?  
Would

Would it nullifie the obligation of God's Law, and make Man's own inclination his only rule? Or, if it be said, because it is foreknown, *Man will* do such a thing, therefore *he may*, where is the connection? For what influence can foreknowledg have, to alter, or affect, any way, either the nature of the thing foreknown, or the temper of the person that shall do it; any more than the present knowledg of the same thing, now in doing? Which knowledg none would deny to God: And which, when it occurs to a man, is no more understood to make an evil action innocent, than the action makes the eye guilty, of him that beholds it only, and detests it at once. Surely what is, in its own nature, whether, good, or evil, can never not be so, be it fore-

foreknown or not foreknown.

But if what was otherwise man's duty, be still his duty, what can make it unfit that it be declared, and made known to him to be so? And how is that otherwise to be done, than by these disputed means? Yea (for this is the case) what can make it less fit, than it would be that God should cease to rule over the World? and quit the right of his Government to his revolted creatures, upon no other reason, than only that he foresees they have a mind to invade it?

It may now, perhaps, be said, All this reasoning tends indeed to establish the contrary assertion, [that notwithstanding God do foreknow man's sin, it is however necessary he forewarn him of it] but it answers not the objected

jected difficulty. *viz.* How reasonably any such means are used for an unattainable end. As it is manifest, the end, *Man's Obedience*, cannot be attained when it is foreknown *he will not obey.*

It may here, before we proceed further, not be unseasonable to consider (A matter, as is known, wont to be much vexed in the Schools) *how God may be said to act for any end at all.* And it appears very certain, that he, who is so every way absolutely perfect, and happy, cannot be thought to intend, and pursue an end, after the same manner as we are wont to do. §. X.

We being conscious to our selves of indigency, or, at the best, of obligation to the Authour of our Beings, are wont to design

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this or that end for the relieving of our selves, or the approving our selves to him. And, our satisfaction depending upon the attainment of it, we solicitously deliberate about the fittest means to attain it ; and are tos't with various Passions , of desire, and hope, and fear, and joy, and grief, according as the end is apprehended more or less excellent, or likely to be attained ; varying often our course upon new emergencies, as this or that may probably promote, or hinder the success of our pursuit. In short, we pursue ends, as being both impatient of disappointment, and uncertain of their attainment.

The Blessed God, being indigent of nothing, nor under obligation to any one, cannot be supposed to propound an end to himself

himself as that whereupon his satisfaction depends, which were inconsistent with his already-compleat felicity; and would argue him but potentially happy. But acting alwaies from an immense Self-sufficient fulnes of life, and of all perfections, doth ever satisfie himself in himself, and take highest complacency in the perfect goodnes, congruity and rectitude of his own most Holy Will and Way.

And again, as he doth not seek a yet-unattained satisfaction, in any end he can be supposed to propound to himself; So nor can he be thought to deliberate, as we are wont to do, concerning the means of effecting any. For deliberation would imply doubtfulnes and uncertainty, which his absolute Perfection cannot ad-

mit ; Nor doth need, the whole frame and compass of things intended by him, in their distinct references and tendencies, being, at once, present to his all-comprehending view ; so that there can be no place for any intermediate knowledg with him, or for any new resolves thereupon.

Acts 15. *Known to the Lord are all his Works from the beginning of the World.*

**SXI.** This being premised ; It is now further to be considered , that howsoever one end oftentimes is not attained, unto which the publicly extant declarations of the Divine Will have a visible aptitude, *viz. the obedient compliance of men with them* ; another, more noble end was, however, attainable, not unbecoming the designment of the Divine Wisdom, and which  
it



it was every way most worthy of God to be more principally intent upon.

It is fit the mention of this be prefac't with an obvious remark; That the misapprehension of the state of things between God and Man doth, in great part, owe it self, to our aptnes to compare unduly, the Divine Government with that of Secular Rulers; and our expectation to find them in all things agreeing with each other. Whereas there cannot but be a vast difference, between the *constitution*, and *end* of God's Government over (his Creatures, and more especially) Mankind, and that of Man over his fellow Creatures of the same kind.

The Government of secular, humane Rulers, can never be, in the constitution of it, altogether

absolute, nor ought, in the design of it, primarily to intend the personal advantage of the Ruler himself, who as much depends upon his Subjects, and hath (at least) as great need of them, as they can be understood to have of him. But as to the Blessed God the matter is apparent, and hath its own triumphant evidence, that since he is the Original and Root of all Being, that all things are meer dependencies upon his absolute pleasure, and entirely of him, and by him, all ought to be to him that he alone might have the glory.

Ro. II.

Wherefore, it must be asserted, and cannot fail of obtaining to be acknowledged, by every impartial, and sober considerer of things, that there is a much more noble and important end, that all

all God's public Edicts, and Declarations to men (the instruments of his Government over them) do more principally aim at, than their advantage, *viz.* the dignity and decorum of his Government it self. And that he may be found in every thing to have done as became him, and was most worthy of himself. And what could be more so, than that he should testify the aversion of his own Pure, and Holy Nature, to whatsoever was unholy and impure, his love of righteousness and complacency to be imitated herein, together with his steady, gracious Propension to receive all them into the communion of his own Felicity or Blessednes (for the Redeemer's sake) who should herein comply with him?

Nor are we to understand that

he herein so designs the reputation of his Government, as men are often wont to do things out of design for their interest, *in that kind*, that are *otherwise*, against their (over-ruled) inclination. But we are to account these his declarations (altho they are acts of an intelligent Agent, and the products of wisdom and counsel, yet also) the spontaneous emanations of his own holy, and gracious Nature, such as wherein he most fully agrees, and consents with himself. And is it now to be expected, that, because he foresees men will be wicked, and do what shall be unworthy of them, he must therefore lay aside his Nature, and omit to do what shall be worthy of himself ?

§. XII. And hereupon it may be expected,

pected, the more ingenuous, and candid, will allow themselves to think the matter tolerably clear, in reference to the former part of the proposed difficulty ; *i.e.* will apprehend this way of dealing with men *not imprudent*, or inconsistent with the *Divine Wisdom*, since, tho one end, in a great part, fail, yet another, more valuable, is attained.

But yet, as to the latter part, the difficulty may still urge, *viz.* how it can stand with sinceritie, where-as that end also which failes, seems to have been most directly intended, that the Blessed God should seem so earnestly intent upon it. Since it is hardly conceiveable, that the same thing should be, at once, seriously intended as an end, and yet, at the same time, give the eye, which  
seems

seems to design it ; no other prospect, than of a thing never to be brought to pass.

Wherefore we are next to consider, that we may proceed gradually, And not omit to say what is in it self considerable ; tho it is not all (which cannot be said at once) that is to be said ; That the public declarations of the Divine Will, touching man's duty, do attain that very end [his obedient compliance therewith] in great part, and as to many (altho it be foreknown they will prove ineffectual with the most) and are the no less successful, than the apt means of attaining it.

Nor, certainly, if it were foreknown the World would be so divided, as that some would obey, and others not obey, was it therefore the fittest course, that these

two sorts should, by some extraordinary act of Providence, be carefully severed from each other; and *those* be dealt withal apart from the rest: But rather, that the Divine Edicts should be of an universal tenour, and be directed to all as they are; the matter of them being of universal concernment, and equally sutable to the common case of all men.

Neither yet was it necessary, §. XIII. that effectual care should be taken, they should actually reach all, and be apply'd to every individual person. Since it is apparently to be resolved into the wickednes of the World, that they do not so; and that there is not an universal diffusion of the Gospel into every part.

For it being evident to any ones  
re-

reflection, that men are in a state of apostacy and defection from their Maker and common Lord, and therefore subject to his displeasure; Whereas the Merciful God hath done his own part, and so much beyond what was to be expected from him; issued out his Proclamations of Peace, and Pardon, upon so easie and indulgent terms, as are expressed in his Gospel; if, hereupon, men also did their part, behaved themselves suitably to the exigencie of their case, and as did become reasonable Creatures, fallen under the displeasure of their Maker, (whereof their common condition affords so innumerable, so pregnant proofs) The Gospel, wheresoever it should arrive, would have been entertained with so great a transport of joy,  
and



and so ready and universal acceptance, as very soon to have made a great noise in the World: And being found to be of an universal tenour and concernment, and that what it saies to one Nation, it equally saies the same to every one; It could not but be, that Messengers would interchangeably have run from Nation, to Nation; some to communicate, others to enquire after those strange tidings of great joy unto all people, lately sent from Heaven; concerning the *Emmanuel*, God with us; God, again upon his return to Man, and *now in Christ reconciling the World to himself*. And thus how easily, and *even naturally*, would the Gospel soon have spread it self thorough the World? Especially the merciful God having so provided,

ded, that there should be an office constituted, and set up; a sort of men, whose whole business it should be, to propagate, and publish those happy tidings.

But that men should so indulge their sensual, terrene inclination, as not at all to use their understandings, and considering power, about other matters than only what are within the sight of their eye, when by so easie and quick a turn of thoughts they might *feel and find out* who made them, and was the Original of their life and being, and that things are not right, and as they should be, between him and them; and so by what is within the compass of natural revelation, be prepared for what is super-natural. And not that only, but to that stupidity, by which they are unapt to enquire

enquire after, and receive, to adde that obstinate malignity, by which they are apt to reject, and oppose the merciful discoveries, and overtures of their offended, reconcileable Creatour, and Lord : How manifestly doth this devolve the whole business, of the little, slow progress of the Gospel in the World, upon themselves only !

As suppose we a Prince of the greatest Clemency , Benignity, and Goodnes, from whom a whole Countrey of his Subjects have made a most causeless defection ; hereupon to send , to the whole Body of the Rebels, a gracious Proclamation of free Pardon, upon their return to their allegiance, and duty ; and it only from hence comes to pass, that every individual person of them, distinctly understands not what  
the

the Message from their Prince did import ; because, they that heard it would not , many of them, allow themselves to consider and regard it ; and others of them , with despiteful violence , fell upon the Heraulds, barbarously butchering some of them, and ignominiously repulsing the rest. Who would not say, that Prince had fully done his part, and acquitted himself answerably to the best Character, tho he should send to the Rebels no further overtures. Much more, if, thorough a long tract of time , he continue the same amicable endeavours for their reducement; notwithstanding the constant experience of the same ill success? Who would not cast the whole busines of the continued ill understanding , between  
him,

him ; and the revolvers , upon themselves. And reckon it impossible, any should be ignorant, of his kind and benign inclinations and intentions, if an implacable enmity, and disaffection to him, and his Government, were not their common temper ?

Tho, so infinitely do the Mercies of God, exceed those of the most Merciful Prince on Earth, as well as his knowledg and power ; that wheresoever there are any exempt cases, we must conceive him, eqally able, and inclined, to consider them distinctly. And so vastly different, may we well suppose, the degrees of happines and misery to be, in the other World ; as that there may be latitude enough, of punishing and rewarding men , proportionably to the degrees of light  
F they

they have had, and the more or less malignity, or propension to reconciliation, was found with them thereupon.

- §. XIV. Nor again was it at all incongruous, or unbecoming, that the Blessed God, this being the common temper, and disposition of all men, to reject his gracious tenders, should provide, by some extraordinary means, that they might not be finally rejected by all. For what can be more appropriate to Sovereignty (even where it is infinitely less absolute) than, arbitrarily, to design the objects of special favour? Who blames a Prince, for placing special marks of his Royal bounty, or clemency here and there, as he thinks fit? or that he hath some peculiar favourites, with whom

whom he familiarly converses, whom he hath won, by some or other not-common inducements, and assured their loyal affection : tho there be thousands of Persons in his dominions besides, of as good parts, dispositions, and deserts as they ? It belongs to Sovereignty, only so, to be favourable to some, as, in the mean time, to be just towards all.

Yea and it must be acknowledged, such are the dispensations of the holy God towards the whole community of mankind, as import, not only strict righteousness, but great clemency and mercie also.

Tho they might easily understand themselves to be offenders, and liable to the severities of his Justice, they are spared by his patience, sustained by his bounty ,

protected by his power, Their lives and properties are fenced by his own lawes. And whereas they are become very dangerous enemies to one another: and each one his own greatest enemy; It is provided by those laws, even for the worst of men, that none shall injure them, that all love them, and seek their good. He interposes his authority on their behalf; and, if any wrong them, he takes it for an affront done to himself. By the same lawes, they are directed to industry, frugality, Sobriety, temperance, to exercise a Government over themselves, to bridle and subdue their own exorbitant lusts and passions, their more immediate tormentours, and the sources of all the calamities and miseries, which befall them in this World.

By



By all which evidences of his great care, and concern for their welfare, They might understand him to have favourable propensions towards them, and that, tho they have offended him, he is not their implacable enemy; And might, by his goodnes, be led to repentance.

Yea and moreover; he hath sent them a Redeemer, his own Son, an incarnate Deity, who came down into this World, full of grace and truth, upon the most merciful errand. (And they have some of them been in transports, when they have but fancy'd such a descent, for the doing them, only, some lighter good turn; as upon the cure of the Creeple. *The* Act. 14. *Gods (say they) are come down in the likeness of Men!*)

He being filled with the glo-

rious fulnes of the Godhead, hath been a voluntary sacrifice for the sins of men ; And if they would beleive and obey him, they would find that sacrifice is accepted, and available for them.

And tho they are disabled to do so, only by their own wicked inclination, even against that also they have no cause to despair of being relieved, if they would (which they might) admit the thoughts of their impotency, and the exigencie of their case, and did seriously implore Divine help.

XV. Now with whom these methods succeed well, there is no suspicion of insinceritie ; Let us see what pretence there can be for it, with the rest.

It is to be considered; that, as to them, he doth not apply himself

self to every (or to any) person immediately, and severally, after some such tenour of speech as this, “ I know thee to be a  
 “ profligate, hopeles wretch, and  
 “ that thou wilt finally disregard  
 “ whatsoever I say to thee, and  
 “ consequently perish and become  
 “ miserable. But however (tho  
 “ I foresee most certainly thou  
 “ wilt not, yet ) I entreat thee  
 “ to hear, and obey, and live. Indeed sending a Prophet to a promiscuous people, he foretells him of such ill success \*. But it <sup>\*Ezekiel.</sup>  
 is not told him he should succeed <sup>Ch. 3. 7.</sup>  
 so ill universally, and it is im-  
 ply'd, he should not. † <sup>† V. 21.</sup>

But the Course the great God takes, is only to apply himself to these (as hath been said) in common with the rest. For if it be said he also applies himself to  
 F 4\                      them

them by the private dictates of his Spirit; He doth not, by it, make formed speeches to men. But as to those its common motions, whereby it applies it self unto them, doth only solícite, in a stated manner of operation, in and by their own reason and consciences (as he concurs with our inferiour faculties, and with the inferiour Creatures, sutablely to their natures and capacities) speaking no other, than their own language, as they are instructed out of his Word, or by other means. Which he usually continues to do, till, by their resistencies, they have sealed up their own Consciences, and consequently (according to its more ordinary fixed course, and lawes of access and recess) shut out the Holy Spirit both at once. Nor is it  
more

more to be expected, he should *universally* alter that course; than that he should alter the courses of the Sun, Moon, and Stars, and innovate upon universal nature.

So that what is endeavoured for the reducement of such, as finally refuse to return, by particular applications to this or that person, and beyond what is contained in the public declarations of his written Word, is by substituted Ministers, and inferiour Agents, that know no more of the event, than they do themselves.

And that this was the fittest way of dealing with reasonable Creatures, who, that will use his own reason, sees not?

That our disquisition may be s.XVI.  
here

here a little more strict, we shall enquire both,

*What may be supposed possible to be alledg'd out of God's Word, in reference to them that persist in wickedness till they finally perish, which it can be thought not consistent with sinceritie to have inserted, upon the supposed foresight of so dismal an issue.*

*And what more convenient course we can think of, which sincerity (as we apprehend) would have required.*

*As to the former.* It may, perhaps, be alledg'd, that he professes to will the salvation of all men. Not to desire the death of him that dyeth. Yea and professes himself grieved that any perish. Now these things, compared with his public declarations, and tenders, directed, in an universal tenour,

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1 Tim. 2.

4.

Ezek. 18.

32.

Pl. 81.

12, 13.

to all men, carry that appearance and shew with them, as if he would have it believ'd, his end were to save all. Wherewith his foresight of the perdition of so many, seems ill to agree. For, how can that end be seriously intended, which it is foreseen will not be brought about? And how can it be thought to consist with sincerity, that there should be an appearance of his having such an end, unto which, a *serious* *real* intention of it doth not correspond?

Wherefore we shall here examine, what *appearance* such expressions as those above recited, can, by just interpretation, be understood to amount unto.

And then shew that there is *really* with the Blessed God, what doth truly and fully correspond  
to

to that appearance. And very agreeably too, with the hypothesis of his foreseeing how things will finally issue, with very many.

And first, that we may understand the true import of the expressions which we have mentioned, and others of like sound and meaning. We are to consider, that (tho being taken severally and apart, they are not capable of a sense, prejudicial to the cause, the defence whereof we have undertaken, which we shall afterwards more distinctly evince, yet) it were very injurious, to go about to affix a sense, unto a single expression, without weighing the general design of the writings, whereof it is a part.

It were quite to frustrate the use of words, when a matter is



to be represented, that is copious, and consists of many parts and branches; which cannot be comprehended in one, or a few sentences, if we will pretend to estimate, and make a judgment of the Speakers full meaning, by this or that single passage, only, because we have not patience, or leasure, to hear the rest; or perhaps have a greater disposition to cavil his words, than understand his meaning.

If a Course resembling this should be taken, in interpreting the Edicts, or Lawes of Princes, and States (suppose it were a Proclamation of Pardon to delinquent Subjects) and only this or that favourable clause be fastened upon, without regard to the inserted Provifo's and Conditions; The ( concerned ) interpreters  
might

might do a slight, temporary, and easily remediable wrong to the Prince; but are in danger, more fatally, to wrong themselves.

The Edicts of the great God, that are publicly extant to Mankind (the universal publication whereof, they partly withstand, and which they too commonly deprave, and perversly mis-interpret, where they do obtain) carry no such appearance with them, as if he had ever proposed it to himself, for his end, to save all men, or any man, let them do what they please, or how destructive a Course soever they take, and shall finally persist in.

If that were supposed his design, his so seemingly serious counsels, and exhortations, were as ludicrous, as they could be thought, if it were as peremptorily

rily determined all should perish. For what God will, by Almighty Power, immediatly work, without the subordinate concurrence of any second cause, must be *necessarily*. And it is equally vain, solicitously to endeavour the engaging of subordinate Agents, to do that which *without them* is *absolutely necessary*, as it were to endeavour that, *by them*, which is *absolutely impossible*.

That which his declarations §.XVII. to men do amount unto, is, in summe, thus much, That, whereas they have, by their defection, and revolt from him, made themselves liable to his Justice, and very great consequent miseries; he is willing to pardon, save and restore them to a blessed state, upon such terms as shall be agreeable

able (the recompence due to his injured Law , being otherwise provided for, at no expence of theirs) to the nature of that Blessednes they are to enjoy, the Purity of his own Nature, and the Order, and Dignity of his Government. That is, that they seriously repent, and turn to him, Love him as the Lord their God, with all their Heart and Soul, and Might, and Mind; and one another as themselves. ( being to make together one happy Community, in the participation of the same Blessednes) Commit themselves by entire Trust, subjection and devotednes to their great and merciful Redeemer, according to the measure of light, wherewith he shall have been revealed and made known to them; Submit to the motions and dictates of his  
 Blessed

Blessed Spirit, whereby the impression of his own holy Image is to be renewed in them, and a Divine Nature imparted to them; And carefully attend to his Word as the means, the impressivè instrument or seal, by which, understood and considered, that impression shall be made, and the very seed out of which that Holy Nature, and the entire frame of the New Creature shall result and spring up in them; so as to make them apt unto the obedience that is expected from them, and capable of the Blessednes they are to expect. That if they neglect to attend to these external discoveries, and refuse the ordinary aids and assistences of his good Spirit, and offer violence to their own Consciences, they are not to expect he should over-power them,

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by a strong hand, and save them against the continuing dis-inclination of their own wills.

Nor (whatsoever extraordinary acts he may do upon some, to make them willing) is there any universal Promise in his Word; or other encouragement, upon which any may reasonably promise themselves that; in the neglect and disuse of all ordinary means, such power shall be used with them, as shall finally overcome their averse disaffected hearts.

- s. XVIII. 'Tis true that he frequently uses much importunity with men, and enforces his Lawes with that earnestnes, as if it were his own great interest to have them obey'd; Wherein, having to do with men, he doth like a man, solicitously intent

intent upon an end which he cannot be satisfy'd till he attain. Yet withal, he hath interspersed, every where in his Word, so frequent, God-like Expressions of his own Greatnes, All-sufficiency and Independency upon his Creatures, as that if we attend to these his Public declarations, and manifests of himself *entirely*; So as to compare one thing with another, we shall find the matter not at all dissembled; but might collect *this* to be the state of things, between him, and us; that he makes no overtures to us, as thinking us considerable, or as if any thing were to accrue to him from us. But that, as he takes pleasure in the diffusion of his own goodnes, so it is our interest to behave our selves suitably thereunto, and, according as we comply with it,

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and continue in it, or do not, so we may expect the delectable communications of it, or taste, otherwise, his just severity. That, therefore, when he exhorts, obtests, intreats, beseeches that we would obey and live; speaks as if he were grieved at our disobedience, and what is like to ensue to us therefrom; These are merciful condescensions, and the efforts of that goodnes, which chooseth the fittest wayes of *moving us*, rather than that he is *moved himself*, by any such Passions, as we are wont to feel in our selves, when <sup>we</sup> are pursuing our own designs. And that he vouchsafeth to speak in such a way as is less sutable *to himself*, that it may be more sutable *to us*, and might teach us, while he so far complies with us, how becoming it is that  
we

we answerably bend our selves to a compliance with him. He speaks, sometimes, as if he did *suffer somewhat humane*, as an apt means (and which to many proves effectual) to bring us to enjoy, at length, *what is truly divine*. We may, if we consider, and lay things together, understand these to be gracious insinuations; Whereby, as he hath not left the matter liable to be so mis-understood, as if he were really affected with solicitude, or any perturbation concerning us (which he he hath sufficiently given us to understand his Blessed Nature cannot admit of.) So nor can they be thought to be disguises of himself, or misrepresentations, that have nothing in him corresponding to them. For they really signifie the obedience, and

blessednes of those his Creatures  
 that are capable thereof, to be  
 more pleasing and agreeable to  
 his Nature, and Will; than that  
 they should disobey and perish.  
 (which is the utmost that can  
 be understood meant, by those  
 words, *God will have all men to be  
 saved and come to the knowledg of the  
 truth*) But withal, that he so ap-  
 prehends the indignity done to  
 his Government, by their disobe-  
 dience, that if they obey not (as  
 the indulgent constitution and  
 temper of his Law, and Govern-  
 ment now are, in and by the Re-  
 deemer) they must perish. And  
 that he hath also such respect to  
 the congruity and order of things,  
 as that it shall not be the ordina-  
 ry method of his Government  
 over reasonable Creatures, to  
 over-power them into that obe-  
 dience,

dience, by which it may come to pass that they perish not. All which may be collected from those his own plain words; in that other recited Text (and many besides of like import.) When, with so awful solemnity, he professes, that *as he lives he takes no* Ezek. 33. *pleasure in the death of sinners, but that they may turn and live; and adds, Turn ye, turn ye, why will you die?* That is, that their repentance, and consequent welfare, would be *more grateful* to him, than their perdition, upon their persevering in destructive waies. But yet, that if they were not moved to repent, by these his pleadings and expostulations used with them, they *should die*, and were therefore concern'd, to attend and hearken, to such his reasonings and warnings, as the apt

means to work their good ; not expecting he should take extraordinary courses with them, in order to it. And that the *real respect* he had thereunto, should never induce him, to use any indecorous course, to bring it about; but that he had a more principal respect to the rules of Justice, and the order of his Government, than to their concerns. And that he, notwithstanding, expresses himself aggrieved that any finally perish; If we consider and recollect, what notices he hath furnished our Minds with, of the Perfections of a Deity, and what he hath remonstrated to us of his own Nature, so plainly, in his Word; we cannot understand more by it, than the calm dispassionate resentment and dislike, which most perfect Purity, and Good-

Goodnes have, of the sinfulness and miserable ruine, of his own Creatures.

In all which we have a most unexceptionable *Idea* of God, and may behold the comly *conjunction* of his large Goodnes, strict Righteousnes, and most accurate Wisdom all together. As we are also concerned, in making our estimate of his waies, to consider them. And not to take our measure of what is futable to God, by considering him according to one single Attribute only ; but as they all are united, in his most Perfect *Being*. And in that blessed harmony, as not to infer with him a difficulty what to do, or what not. Which sometimes falls out with men, where there is an imperfect resemblance of those Divine Excellencies, not so exactly

actly contempered together. As it was with that *Spartan* Prince and General in *Plutarch*, when, finding a necessity to march his Army, and taking notice of one, for whom he had a peculiar kindness, that, thorough extream weakness, was not possibly to be removed, he look't back upon him, expressing his sense of that exigencie, in those emphatical words, *How hard a matter is it at once* *ἵνα* *κατασπῆναι*, *to exercise pity and be wise!*

God's own Word misrepresents him not, but gives a true account of him, if we allow our selves to confer it with it self, one part of it with another. Nor doth any part of it, taken alone, import him so to have will'd the happines of men, for any end of his, that he resolved he would, *by whatsoever means* certainly effect it ;



it ; As we are wont, many times, with such eagernes to pursue ends upon which we are intent, as not to consider of right or wrong, fit or unfit in our pursuit of them, and so let the cost of our means, not seldom, eat up our end. Nor did that belong to him, or was his part as our most benign, wise, and righteous Governour, to provide that we should certainly not transgress, or not suffer prejudice thereby ; but that we should not do so, thorough his omission of any thing, which it became him to do to prevent it.

It may therefore be of some s. XIX.  
 Use further to take notice, that a very divers consideration must be had, of the *ends which shall be effected by Gods own action only*, and of those *which are to be brought about*  
(in

(in concurrence, and subordination to his own) *by the intervenient action of his Creatures.* Especially (which is more to our purpose) such of them as are intelligent, and capable of being govern'd by Lawes.

As to the former sort of these ends, we may be confident they were all most absolutely intend-  
ed, and can never fail of being  
accomplisht.

For the latter, It cannot be  
universally said so. For *these*, be-  
ing not entirely his ends, But  
partly his, and partly prescribed  
by him, to his reasonable Crea-  
tures, to be theirs. We are to  
conceive he alwaies, most abso-  
lutely, intendsto do, what he righ-  
teously esteems congruous, should  
be his own part; which he ex-  
tends and limits, as seems good  
unto

unto him. And sometimes, of his own good Pleasure, assumes to himself the doing of so much, as shall ascertain the end ; Effectually procuring, that his Creature shall do his part also. That is, not only enacts his Law, and adds exhortations, warnings, promises, to enforce it, but also emits that effectual influence, whereby the inferiour wheels shall be put into motion, the powers and faculties of his governed Creature excited and assisted, and (by a spirit in the wheels) made as the Chariots of a willing people. At other times and in other instances, he doth less, and meeting with resistance, sooner retires ; follows not his external Edicts and Declarations, with so potent and determinative an influence ; but that the  
 Creature,

Creature, through his own great default, may omit to do his part, and so *that end* be not effected.

That the course of his Oeconomy towards men on earth is, *de facto*, ordered with this diversity, seems out of question. Manifest experience shews it. Some do sensibly perceive that motive influence, which others do not. The same persons, at sometimes, find not that, which at other times they do. His own Word plainly asserts it. *He works in us to will and to do, of his own good pleasure. Where he will, he, in this respect, shews mercy; where he will, he hardeneth, or doth not prevent but that men be hardened.* And indeed, we should be constrain'd to rase out a great part of the Sacred Volume, if we should not admit it to be so.

And

And as the equity and fitness of his making such difference (when it appears he doth make it) cannot without profanenes be doubted, so it is evident, from what was before said, they are far removed from the reach and confines of any reasonable doubt; since he forsakes none, but being first forsaken.

Nor have men any pretence to complain of subdolous dealing, or that they are surprisngly disappointed, and lurcht of such help, as they might have expected; inasmuch as this is so plainly extant in God's open manifests to the World, that he uses a certain arbitrarines, especially in the more exuberant dispensation of his grace; and is inserted to that purpose, that they may be caution'd not to neglect lower assistences;

stences ; and warned, because he

**Phil. 2.** *Works to will and to do of his own*  
**12,13.** *pleasure, therefore to work out their*  
*own salvation with fear and trem-*

**PROV. 1.** *bling. Whereupon, elsewhere,*  
*after the most persuasive alluring*  
*invitations. Turn ye at my reproof,*  
*I will pour out my Spirit to you, I will*  
*make known my words to you, It is*  
*presently subjoyned, Because I*  
*called and ye refused, I stretched out*  
*my hand and no man regarded. But*  
*ye have set at nought all my counsel,*  
*and would none of my reproof ; I also*  
*will laugh at your calamity, I will*  
*mock when your fear cometh.*

From all which it is plainly to be understood, that the general strain and drift of God's external revelation of his Mind to Man, in his Word, and the aspect of even those passages, that can, with most colour, be thought to signify  
any

any thing further, do amount to nothing more than this, that he doth so far *really will* the salvation of all, as not to omit the doing that which may effect it, if they be not neglectful of themselves, but not so as to effect it by that extraordinary exertion of Power, which he thinks fit to employ upon some others.

Nor is it reasonably to be doubted, (*such a will* being all that can be pretended to be the visible meaning of the passages before noted) whether there be such a Will in God or no. And so somewhat really corresponding (the next thing promised to be discoursed) to the aspect and appearance hereof, which is offered to our view. For what should be the reason of the doubt? He, who best understands his own Nature,  
H
having

S. XX.

having said of himself what imports no less; why should we make a difficulty to believe him? Nor indeed can any notices we have of the Perfections of the Divine Nature be less liable to doubt, than what we have of *his unchangeable veracity*; whence, as it is *impossible* to him to lye, it must be *necessary*, that he be *really willing* of what he hath *represented* himself so to be.

I must here profess my dislike of the terms of that common distinction the *voluntas beneplaciti, et signi* in this present case. Under which, such as coyned, and those that have much used it, have only rather, I doubt not, conceal'd a good meaning, than expressed by it an *ill one*. It seems, I confess, by its more obvious aspect, too much to countenance  
the



the ignominious slander, which profane and atheistical dispositions would fasten upon God, and the course of his procedure towards men; and which it is the design of these Papers to evince of as much absurdity and folly, as it is guilty of impiety and wickedness: As tho he only intended to *seem willing* of what he really was not; That there was an appearance to which nothing did *subesse*. And then why is the latter call'd *voluntas*? unless the meaning be he did only will the *sign*, which is false and impious; and if it were true, did he not will it with the will of *good pleasure*? And then the members of the distinction are confounded. Or, as if the evil actions of men were, more truly, the objects of his good Pleasure, than

their forbearance of them.

And of these faults the application of the distinction of God's *secret Will*, and *revealed*, unto this case, tho it be useful in many, is as guilty.

s. XXI.

The truth is (unto which we must esteem our selves obliged to adhere, both by our assent, and defence) that God doth *really* and *complacentially* will (and therefore doth with most unexceptionable sincerity declare himself to will) that *to be done and enjoy'd by many men*, which he doth not, universally, will *to make them do, or irresistibly procure that they shall enjoy*. Which is no harder assertion, than that the impure will of degenerate sinful Man is opposite to the Holy Will of God; and the malignity of Man's will to the benignity of his. No harder

der than that there is sin and misery in the World, which how can we conceive otherwise, than as a repugnancie to the good and acceptable Will of God?

Methinks it should not be difficult to us to acknowledg, that God doth *truly*, and *with complacencie*, will, whatsoever is the holy righteous matter of his own Lawes. And if it should be with any a difficulty, I would only make this supposition. What if all the World were yet in innocencie, yielding entire, universal obedience to all the now extant Laws of God, which have not reference to Man as now fallen (as those of repentance, Faith in a Mediatour, &c.) would it now be a doubt with any, Whether God did truly and really *will*, and were *pleased with the*

holines and righteousness which were every where to be found in the World? Surely we would not, in this case, imagine the creatures will more pure and holy than the Divine; or that he were displeased with men for their being righteous and holy. Now again suppose the World revolted, what then is that holy Will of God changed? will we not say it remains the same holy Will still? And stands the same Rule of righteousness and duty that it was? Doth the change of his Rebel-Creatures infer any with him? Or do only the *declarations* of his former Will remain to be their rule, and keep them still obliged, *his Will it self* being become another from what it was? Surely he might as easily have changed his *Lawes*.

And

And if we say his Will is changed, how should we know it to be so? *If we know it not*, surely such a thing should not be said or thought. *If we knew it*, how should those yet-extrant Lawes and Declarations continue to oblige, *against the Law-givers known will*? And then the easie expedient to nullifie the obligation of a Law, that were thought too restrictive, were to disobey it. And men might, by sinning once, license themselves to do the same thing (tho then we could not call it sinning) alwaies. And so the Creatures should be the supream, and ruling will. Nor had it been a false suggestion, but a real truth, that Man, by becoming a sinner, might make himself a God.

Or, if it shall be thought fit to  
H 4 say,

say, that the Divine Will would not, in that supposed case, be said to be changed; but only, that now, the event makes it appear not to have been, what we thought it was; That were to impute both impuritie and dissimulation to the Holy Blessed God, as his fixed Attributes. And what we thought unfit, and should abhorre, to imagine might have place with him one moment, to affix to him for perpetuitie.

- §. XXII. And whereas it may be thought to follow hence, that hereby we ascribe to God a liableness to frustration, and disappointment. That is without pretence. The resolve of the Divine Will, in this matter, being not concerning the event *what Man shall do*, But  
con-

concerning his duty *what he should*, and concerning the connection between his duty, and his happiness. Which, we say, he doth not only seem to will, but wills it really and truly. Nor would his Prescience of the event, which we all this while assert, let frustration be so much as possible to him. Especially, it being at once foreseen, that his Will, being crossed in this, would be fulfilled in so important a thing, as the preserving the decorum of his own Government. Which had been most apparently blemisht, beyond what could consist with the Perfections of the Deity, if either his Will concerning Man's duty, or the declarations of that Will, had not been substantially, the same that they are.

We

We are, therefore, in assigning the object of this or that act of the Divine Will, to do it *entirely*, and to take the whole object together, without dividing it, as if the Will of God did wholly terminate upon what indeed is but a part (and especially if that be but a less considerable part) of the thing willed. In the present case, we are not to conceive that God, *only*, wills either Man's duty or felicity, or that herein his Will doth solely and ultimately terminate. But, in the whole, the determination of God's Will is, *That Man shall be duly governed, that is, congruously both to himself, and him. That such and such things, most congruous to both, shall be Man's duty, by his doing whereof, the Dignity and Honour of God's own Government*



vernment might be preserved, which was the thing principally to be design'd; and in the first place. And, as what was secondary thereto, that hereby Man's felicity should be provided for. Therefore, it being foreseen a violation would be done to the sacred rights of the Divine Government, by Man's disobedience, it is resolved, they shall be repaired and maintained by other means. So that the Divine Will hath its effect; as to what was its more noble and principal design, the other part failing, only, by his default, whose is the loss.

And if yet it should be insisted, that in asserting God to will what by his Lawes he hath made become Man's duty, even where it is not done, we shall herein ascribe to him, at least, an *ineffectual*

*fectual* and an *imperfect Will*, as which doth not bring to pass the thing willed.

It is answered, that imperfection were with no pretence imputable to the Divine Will, meerly for its not effecting every thing, whereto it may have a *real* propension. But it would be more liable to that imputation, if it should effect any thing, which it were *less fit* for him to effect, than not to effect it. The absolute Perfection of his Will stands in the *proportion*, which every act of it bears, to the importance of the things, about which it is conversant. Even as, with men, the perfection of any act of will is to be estimated, not by the meer peremptory sturdines of it, but by its proportion to the goodnes of the thing willed. Upon which  
account,

account, a meer *velleity* (as many love to speak) when the degree of goodnes in the object claims no more, hath unconceivably greater perfection in it, than the most obstinate *Volution*.

And since the Event forbids us to admit that God did ever will the obedience and felicity of all, with such a VWill as should be effective thereof; if yet his plain Word shall be acknowledged the measure of our belief, in this matter, which so plainly asserts him *some way* to will the salvation of all men, 'tis strange if, hereupon, we shall not admit rather of a will *not-effective* of the thing willed, than *none at all*.

The VWill of God is sufficiently to be vindicated from all imperfection, if he have sufficient  
reason

reason for all the propensions, and determinations of it, whether from the value of the things willed, or from his own Sovereignty who wills them.

In the present case, we need not doubt to affirm, that the obedience and felicity of all men, is of that value, as whereunto a propension of will, by only *simple complacency* is proportionable. Yet, that his not procuring, as to all (by such courses as he *more extraordinarily* takes with some) that they shall, in event, obey and be happy, is upon so much *more valuable* reasons (as there will be further occasion to shew ere long) as that, *not to do it* was more eligible, with the *higher complacency*, of a determinative will.

And since the public declarations of his good will, towards  
all

all men, import no more than the former, and do plainly import so much ; Their correspondency to the matter declared is sufficiently apparent.

And so is the congruity of both with his prescience of the event.

For tho, when God urges and incites men , by exhortations, promises, and threats, to the doing of their own part (which it is most agreeable to his holy gracious Nature to do) he foresee, many will not be moved thereby ; but persist in wilful neglect, and rebellions till they perish : He, at the same time, sees that they *might do* otherwise, and that, if they would comply with his methods, things would otherwise issue with them. His prescience, no way, imposing upon  
them

them a necessity to transgress. For they do it not because he foreknew it, but he only foreknew it because they would do so. And hence he had, as it was necessary he should have, not only *this* for the object of his foreknowledge, *that they would do amiss and perish*. But the whole case in its circumstances, *that they would do so, not thorough his omission, but their own*. And there had been no place left for this state of the case; if his public Edicts and Manifests, had not gone forth, in this tenour as they have.

So that the consideration of his prescience, being taken in, gives us only, in the whole, this state of the Case, That he foresaw men would not take that course, which he *truly* declared himself willing they should (and was graciously ready

ready to assist them in it) in order to their own well-being. Whence all complaint of insincere dealing is left without pretence.

Nor (as we also undertook to s. XXIII. shew) could any course (within our prospect) have been taken, that was fit, in it self, and more agreeable to sincerity.

There are only these two waies to be thought on; besides, Either that God should wholly have forborn to make overtures to men in common.

Or, that he should efficaciously have overpow'ed all into a compliance with them. And there is little doubt, but, upon sober consideration, both of these will be judg'd altogether unfit.

The former; Inasmuch as it  
I had

had been most disagreeable to the exact measures of his Government; to let a race of sinful Creatures persist, thorough many successive Ages, in apostacy and rebellion; when the characters of that Law, first written in Man's heart, were in so great measure outworn, and become illegible; without renewing the impression, in another way; and reasserting his right and authority, as their Ruler and Lord; *To the Holines of his Nature*, not to send into the VWorld such a declaration of his Will, as might be a standing testimony against the impurity, whereinto it was lapsed; *To the goodnes of it*, not to make known upon what termes, and for whose sake, he was reconcileable; *And to the truth of the thing*, since he really had such kind propensions towards men



men in common not to make them known. That it had, it self, been more liable to the charge of insinceritie, to have concealed from men what was *real truth*, and of so much concernment to them. And he did, in revealing them, but act his own Nature; the goodnes whereof is no more lessened, by mens refusal of its offers, than his Truth can be made of none effect by their disbelief of its assertions. Besides the great use such an extant revelation of the way of recovery, was to be of, to those that should obediently comply with it, even after they should be *won* so to do.

○ And the latter we may also s.XXIV. apprehend very unfit too; tho, because that is less obvious, it requires to be more largely insisted on.

For it would seem that if we do not *effect* any thing which we have a real will unto, it must proceed from impotencie, and that we *cannot do it*, which who would say of the great God?

Herein, therefore, we shall proceed by steps. And gradually offer the things that follow to consideration.

As, that it were, indeed, most repugnant to the notion of a Deity, to suppose any thing, which includes in it no contradiction, impossible to *God*, considered according to that *Single Attribute of Power*, only.

But yet we must add, That this were a very unequal way of estimating what *God can do*, that is to consider him as a *meer Being of Power*. For the notion of God so conceiv'd, were very inadequate  
to

to him, which taken entirely, imports the *comprehension of all Perfections*. So that they are two very distant questions, *What the Power of God alone could do; And, What God can do.* And whereas to the former the answer would be, *Whatsoever is not in it self repugnant to be done.* To the latter, it must only be, *Whatsoever it becomes, or is agreeable to a Being every way perfect to do.* And so it is to be attributed to the excellencie of his Nature, if amongst all things not simply impossible, there be any, which it may be truly said *he cannot do.* Or, it proceeds not from the imperfection of his Power, but from the concurrence of all other Perfections in him. Hence his own Word plainly affirms of him, *that he cannot lye.* And by common consent it will be ac-

knowledge, that he cannot do any unjust act whatsoever.

To this I doubt not we may with as common suffrage (when the matter is considered) subjoyne, that *his Wisdom* doth as much limit the exercise of his Power, as *his Righteousnes* or his Truth doth. And that it may with as much confidence, and clearenes, be said and understood, that he cannot do an *unwise*, or imprudent act as an *unjust*.

Further, That as his Righteousnes corresponds to the *Justice of things*, to be done or not done, so doth his *Wisdom* to the *congruity* or fitness. So that he cannot do what it is *unfit* for him to do, because he is *Wise*; and because he is most *Perfectly & Infinitely Wise*, therefore nothing that is *less-fit*. But whatsoever is *fittest*, when a comparison

parison is made between doing this or that, or between doing and not doing, *that* the Perfection of his Nature renders *necessary* to him, and the opposite part *impossible*.

Again, that this *measure* must be understood to have a very large and most general extent unto all the affairs of his Government, the object it concerns being so very large. We, in our observation, may take notice, that fewer questions can occur concerning what is *right* or *wrong*, than what is *fit*, or *unfit*. And whereas any man may in a moment be honest, if he have a mind to it; very few (and that by long experience) can ever attain to be wise. The things about which *Justice* is conversant being reducible to certain rules, but *Wisdom*

supposes very general knowledge of things scarce capable of such reduction. And is, besides, the primary requisite, in any one that bears rule over others. And must therefore most eminently influence all the managements of the Supream Ruler.

§.XXV. It is moreover to be considered, that innumerable congruities lie open to the Infinite Wisdom, which are never obvious to our view or thought. As to a well-studied Scholar, thousands of coherent notions, which an illiterate person never thought of. To a practis't Courtier, or well-educated Gentleman, many decencies and indecencies in the matter of *civil behaviour*, and conversation, which an unbred rustic knowes nothing of. And to an experienced States-man, those impor-

importancies, which never occur to the thoughts of him who daily follows the plough. What Government is there that hath not its *arcana*, profound mysteries and reasons of State that a vulgar wit cannot dive into? And from whence, the account to be given, why this or that is done or not done, is not, alwaies, that it would have been *unjust* it should be otherwise, but it had been *imprudent*. And many things are, hereupon, judged *necessary* not from the *exigencie of Justice*, but *reason of State*. Whereupon, men of modest and sober minds, that have had experience of the wisdom of their Governours, and their happy conduct, thorough a considerable tract of time; when they see things done by them, the leading reasons whereof they do  
not

not understand, and the effect and success comes not yet in view, suspend their censure ; while as yet all seems to them obscure, and wrapt up in clouds and darknes. Yea tho the course that is taken have, to their apprehension, an ill aspect. Accounting it becomes them not, to make a Judgment of things so far above their reach, and confiding in the tried wisdom of their Rulers, who, they believe, see reasons for what they do, into which they find themselves unable to penetrate.

With how much more submission, and humble veneration, ought the methods of the Divine Government to be beheld & adored, upon the certain assurance we have, that all things therein, are managed by that VVisdom, which could never in any thing  
mistake



mistake its way. VVhereas, there was never any continued administration of human Government, so accurate and exact, but that, after some tract of time, some or other errors might be reflected on therein.

Again, it may further be said, without presuming beyond due bounds, That tho infinite congruities must be supposed to lye open to the Divine Understanding, which are concealed from ours, yet that these two things in the general are very *manifestly congruous* to any sober attentive Mind, that directly concern, or may be apply'd to the case, under our present consideration, viz.

33.

That the course of God's Government over the VVorld, be, for the most part, steady, and

and uniform ; not interrupted by very frequent, extraordinary and anomalous actions. And again,  
That he use a royal liberty, of stepping out of his usual course, sometimes, as he sees meet.

It cannot but appear to such as attend , highly incongruous, should we affirm the *antithesis* to either of these ; or lay down counter-positions to them, and suppose the course of the Divine Government to be manag'd agreeably thereunto.

§.XXVI. For, *as to the former* ; what confusion would it make in the World, if there should be perpetual innovations upon Nature ; continual, or exceeding frequent impe-

impeditions, and restraints of second Causes. *In the sphere of Nature*, the Vertues and proper qualities of things, being never certain, could never be understood, or known. *In that of Policy*, no measures, so much as probable, could ever be taken. How much better is it, *in both*, that second Causes, ordinarily follow their inclinations? And why is it not to be thought congruous, that, in some degree, things should be proportionably so, *in the sphere of Grace*? (whereto by and by we shall speak more directly.)

We pray, when our Friends are sick, for their recovery. What can be the sober meaning and design of such prayers? Not that God would work a Miracle for their restitution, (for then we might as well pray for their revival

vival after death) But, that God would be pleased so to co-operate, in the still and silent way of Nature, with second Causes, and so bless means, that they may be recovered, if he see good. Otherwise that they, and we may be prepared to undergo his Pleasure. And agreeable hereto ought to be the intent of our Prayers, in reference to the public affairs, and better posture of the World.

And we may take notice the Divine Wisdom laies a very great stress upon this matter, *the preserving of the common order of things;* and cannot but observe a certain inflexibleness of Providence, herein. And, that it is very little apt to divert from its wonted course. At which weak minds are apt to take offence. To wonder, that, against so many prayers and  
tears,

bears, God will let a good man die; or one whom they love; Or that a Miracle is not wrought to prevent their own being wrong'd, at any time; Or, that the Earth doth not open and swallow up the person that hath done them wrong. Are apt to call for fire from Heaven, upon them that are otherwise minded, and do otherwise, than they would have them. But a Judicious person would consider, if it be so highly reasonable that my desires should be comply'd with; so extraordinarily, than why not all mens? And then were the VWorld filled with Prodigies and confusion. The inconveniencies would soon be to all, equally discernable, and intolerable (as the Heathen Poet takes notice; Should Jupiter's Bar be  
over-

over-easy) Yea and the impossibility were obvious of gratifying all, because of their many counter-desires.

*And for the other*, it were no less incongruous, if the Supream Power should so tie its own hands, and be so astricted to *rules and methods*, as never to do any thing extraordinary, upon never so important occasion. How ill could the World have wanted such an effort of Omnipotence, as the restriction upon the flames from destroying *Sbadrach, Meshach, and Abednego*? Or the Miracles wrought in our Saviour's and the next following Daies? Such things are never done; but when the all-comprehending Wisdom sees it *most congruous*. And that the cause will over-recompense the deflection from the common

common course, If no such thing did ever fall out, what a Temptation were it to mankind, to introduce into their beleif an unintelligent fate instead of a Deity? Besides that the convincing testimony were wanting, which we see is so necessary for the confirmation of any particular revelation from God; which comes not within the compass of natures discovery (upon which account, also, it is as apparently necessary such extraordinary works should not be over-frequent, for then they become ordinary, and useless to that special end) so that here the exertions both of the *ordinate* and *absolute* power God (as some distinguish) have their so appropriate, and so visibly apt, and congruous uses, that they are discernable to a very ordinary

K under.

understanding, how much more  
to the infinite Wisdom of God!

§. XXVII.

Now hereupon we say further,  
There is the like congruity, upon  
as valuable (though not altogether the same) reasons that, in the  
affaires of Grace, There be *some-  
what correspondent*. That, ordi-  
narily, it be sought and expected,  
in the use of ordinary means.  
And that, sometimes, its sove-  
reignty shew it self in preventing  
exertions. And in working so  
heroically, as none have, before  
hand, in the neglect of its ordi-  
nary methods, any reason to ex-  
pect.

And we may fitly add, That  
where Sovereignty is pleased  
thus to have its exercise and de-  
monstrate it self, It is sufficient  
that there be a *general congruity*,  
that it do so sometimes, as an  
ante-



cedent reason to the doing of *some* such extraordinary things, but that there should be a particular leading congruity or antecedent reason, to invite these extraordinary operations of grace, to one person more than another, is not necessary. But it is most congruous, that, herein, it be most arbitrary. Most agreeable to the Supremacy of God; to the State of Sinful Man, who hath infinitely disoblig'd him, and can deserve nothing from him; Yea, and even to the nature of the thing. For, where there is a parity, in any objects of our own choice, there can be no leading reason to this, rather than that. The most prudent man, that is wont to guide himself by never so exquisite wisdom, in his daily actions, where there is a perfect indifferency,

between doing this thing or that, is not liable to censure, that he is not able to give a reason why he did *that*, not *the other*. Wisdom hath no exercise in that case.

But that the Blessed God doth *ordinarily* proceed in these affairs, by a steady rule, and, *sometimes*, shew his liberty of departing from it, is to be resolved into his infinite wisdom, it being, in it self, most fit, he should do both the one, and the other; and therefore *to him* most necessary. Whereupon, the great Apostle Saint Paul, discoursing upon this subject, doth not resolve the matter into *strict justice*, nor *absolute sovereignty* (both which have their place too, in his proceedings with men, as the sacred writings do abundantly testify) but we find him in a transport, in the  
con-

contemplation of the divine wisdom, that, herein, so eminently shines forth. *O the depths of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his waies past finding out!*

ROM. II.  
33. See to  
the same pur-  
pose, c. 16.  
25, 26, 27.  
And Eph.  
1. 5, 6, 7.  
with the 8.

To summe up all, we conclude it obvious to the apprehension of such as consider, that it was more congruous the general course of Gods Government, over man, should be by *moral instruments*.

And, howsoever it were very unreasonable, to imagine, that God cannot in any case, extraordinarily oversway the inclinations, and determine the will of such a creature, in a way agreeable enough to its nature, (tho we particlarly know not, as we

are not concerned to know, or curiously to enquire in what way) And highly reasonable to admit that in many cases he doth.

It is notwithstanding manifest, to any sober reason, that it were very incongruous, this should be the ordinary course of his conduct towards Mankind, or the same persons at all times.

That is, that a whole order of intelligent creatures should be moved, only by inward impulses ; That Gods precepts, promises and comminations, whereof their nature is capable , should be all made impertinencies , through his constant overpowering those that should neglect them ; That the faculties, whereby men are capable of moral Government, should be rendered, *to this purpose*, useless and vain ;  
And

And that they should be tempted to expect, to be constantly manag'd as meer machines, that know not their own use.

Nor is it less apprehensible, how incongruous it were also, on the other hand, to suppose that the exterior frame of Gods Government, should be totally unaccompanied with an internal vital energie; or exclude the inward motions, operations, and influences, whereof such a creature is also fitly capable. Or that God should have barr'd out himself, from all inward access to the spirits of men, or commerce with them. That the supream universal, *paternal mind* (as an heathen call'd it) should have no way for efficacious communications, to his own offspring, when he pleases; that (so unsu-

tably to sovereignty) he should have no objects of special favour, or no peculiar waies of expressing it.

It is manifestly congruous that the divine Government, over man, should be (as it is) mixed or composed of an external frame of lawes, with their proper sanctions, and inforcements, and an internal effusion of power, and vital influence, correspondent to the several parts of that frame; and which might animate the whole, and use it, as instrumental, to the begetting of correspondent impressions on mens spirits.

That this Power be put forth, not (like that of a natural Agent) *ad ultimum* (which if we would suppose the Divine Power to be, new Worlds must be springing up

up every moment) but *gradually*,  
 and with an apt contemperation  
 to the subject, upon which it is  
 designed, to have its operations,  
 and withal, *arbitrarily*, as is be-  
 coming the Great Agent from  
 whom it proceeds, and to whom  
 it, therefore, belongs, to measure  
 its exertions, as seems meet un-  
 to him. That it be *constantly* put  
 forth (tho most gratuitously, espe-  
 cially the disobligation of the  
 Apostacy being considered) upon  
 all, to that degree, as that they  
 be enabled to do much good, to  
 which they are not impelled by  
 it. That it be ever ready (since  
 it is the Power of *Grace*) to go  
 forth in a further degree than it  
 had yet done, wheresoever any  
 former issues of it have been duly  
 comply'd with. Tho it be so lit-  
 tle supposable that Man should  
 hereby

hereby have obliged God there-  
 to, that he hath not any way ob-  
 liged himself; Otherwise, than  
 that he hath imply'd a readines,  
 to impart unto Man what shall  
 be necessary to enable him to  
 obey, so far as, upon the Aposta-  
 cie, is requisite to his relief: If he  
 seriously endeavour to do his own  
 part, by the Power he already  
 hath received. Agreeably to the  
 common saying, *homini facienti*  
*god in se est, &c.* That, according  
 to the Royal Liberty, wherewith  
 it works, it go forth, as to some,  
 with that efficacy, as notwith-  
 standing whatever resistance, yet  
 to overcome, and make them  
 captives to the authority and  
 love of Christ.

The



The universal continued recti- s. xxix.  
tude of all intelligent creatures  
had, we may be sure, been wil-  
led, with a peremptory, effica-  
cious will if it had been best.

That is, if it had not been less  
congruous than to keep them,  
some time (under the expectati-  
on of future confirmation and re-  
ward) upon trial of their fideli-  
ty, and in a state wherein it  
might not be impossible to them  
to make a defection. And so it  
had easily been prevented, that  
ever there should have been an  
apostacie from God, or any sin  
in the world.

Nor was it either *less easie*, by  
a mighty irresistible hand, uni-  
versally to expel sin, than prevent  
it; or *more necessary* or more to  
be expected from him.

But if Gods taking no such  
course,

course, tended to render his Government over the world more *angust*, and awful, *for the present*, and the result, and final issue, of all things more glorious *at length*, and were consequently, *more congruous*; that could not be *so willed*, as to be *effectually procured* by him.

For whatsoever obligation *strict justice* hath upon us, that *congruity* cannot but have upon him. And whereas it would be concluded, that whatsoever any one truly wills, they would effect *if they could*, we admit it for true, and to be applied in the present case. But adde,

That as we rightly esteem that *impossible to us*, which we cannot *justly* do, so is that *to him*, not only, which he cannot do *justly*, but which, upon the whole matter,

ter he cannot do, *most wisely* also. That is, which his infinite wisdom doth not dictate, is most congruous and fit to be done.

Things cohere, and are held together, in the course of his dispensation, by congruities as by adamantine bands, and cannot be otherwise. That is, comparing and taking things together, especially the most important. For otherwise, to have been nicely curious about every minute thing, singly considered, that it might not possibly have been better (as in the frame of this or that *individual* animal or the like) had been needlessly to interrupt the course of Nature, and therefore, it self, *to him* an incongruity. And doth, in them that expect it, import more of a trifling dispo-

disposition, than of true Wisdom.

But *To him* whose Being is most absolutely Perfect to do that, which, all things considered, would be *simply best*, i. e. most becoming him, most honourable, and God-like, is *absolutely necessary*. And consequently, it is to be attributed to his Infinite Perfection, that, *unto him*, to do otherwise, is *absolutely impossible*.

And if we yet see not all these *congruities* which, to him, are *more than a Law*; it is enough that they are obvious to his own eye, who is the only competent Judge.

Yet, moreover, it is finally to be considered, that the methods of the Divine Government, are, besides his, to be exposed to the view;

view; and judgment of *other* Intellectuals *than our own*, and we expect they should to our own, in *another state*. What conception thereof is, already, received and formed in our Minds, is but an Embryo, no less imperfect than our present state is.

It were very unreasonable to expect, since this World shall continue but a little while, that all God's managements, and waies of procedure, in ordering the great affairs of it, should be attempered, and fitted to the judgment, that shall be made of them in this temporary state, that will so soon be over: And to the present apprehension and capacity of our (now so muddled and distempered) Minds. A vast and stable eternity remains, wherein, the whole *Celestial Chorus* shall enter-

entertain themselves, with the grateful contemplation, and applause, of his deep Counsels. Such things as now seem perplex, and intricate to us, will appear most irreprehensibly fair, and comely to *angelical minds*, and our own, when we shall be vouchsaf't a place amongst that happy Community. What discovery God affords of his own glorious Excellencies, and Perfections is *principally* intended to recommend him, in that state; wherein he, and all his waies and works, are to be beheld with everlasting, and most complacential approbation.

Therefore tho now we should covet the clearest and most satisfying account of things, that can be had; we are yet to exercise patience, and not precipitate our judgment

judgment of them before the time: As knowing our present conceptions will differ more, from what they will be hereafter, than those of a *Child*, from the maturer thoughts of the *wisest man*. And that many of our conceits, which we thought wise, we shall, *then*, see cause to put away, as childish things:

The disorder (Sir,) of this heap  
(rather than frame) of thoughts and  
discourse, as it cannot be thought  
more unsutable to the subject, than  
sutable to the Author; and the less  
L                      distillase

displease, by how much it could less be expected to be otherwise, from him, even in the best circumstances; so it may lay some claim to your easier pardon, as having been, mostly, huddled up in the intervals of a troublesome, long Journey. Wherein he was rather willing to take what opportunitie the inconveniencies and hurry of it could allow him; Than neglect any, of using the earliest endeavour to approve himself (as he is your great admirer)

Most honored Sir,

Your most obedient

humble Servant,

H. W.





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